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I N T R O D U C T I O N

The following analysis of the Gulf State of Bahrain was written in the first part of 1976 by the underground organisation, the People's Front in Bahrain (PFB) and is the first text by that group to be published outside the Arabic language.

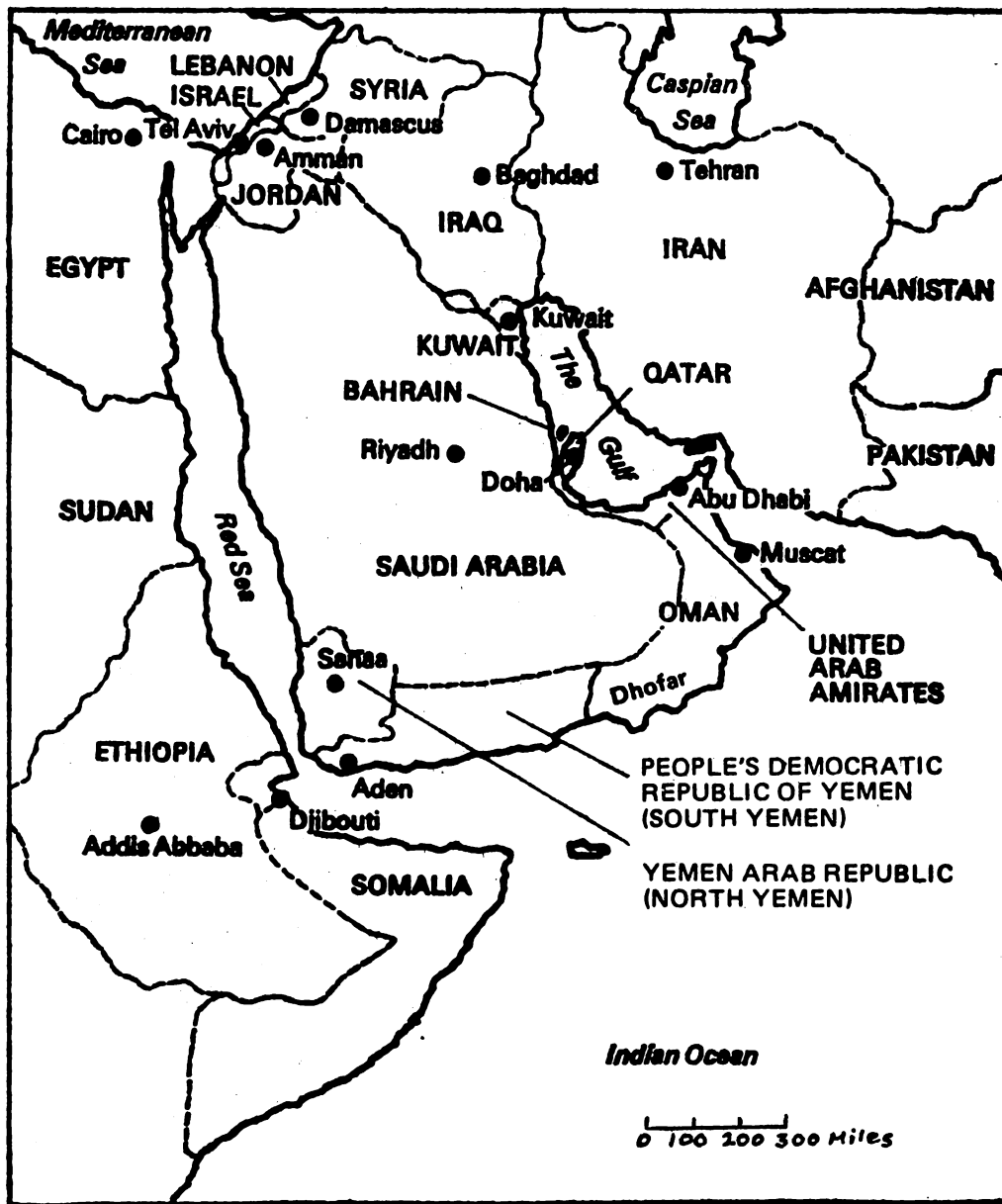
Bahrain has in recent months been attracting a considerable amount of attention in the financial sections of the Western press. For, despite its small size and population (250 square miles, 270,000 people), Bahrain has been turned into the financial and services centre of the Gulf. Within 6 months of a new system of Offshore Banking Units being brought into operation in September 1975 enabling financial operations on an intra-state basis to be carried out under regulations different from those applying to activities within the country, 32 major international banks had applied for licenses to operate out of the country. Many of the financial activities previously based in Beirut are now located in Bahrain, and by the end of 1976 banking business was running at \$6,000 millions - almost half the level in Singapore.

Bahrain has also developed as the services centre of the Gulf. Thousands of the expatriates working in other Gulf states spend their weekends in Bahrain where the tourist facilities are considered better. It has the best telecommunications system of any Arab state in the Gulf. The local airline, Gulf Air, is based there and of course it is to Bahrain that Concorde flies twice a week.

A number of factors explain this special status of Bahrain, and the less publicised fact that it has the strongest workers' movement in the Gulf. Prior to the production of oil in 1932, Bahrain already had a comparatively prosperous economy based on the pearl trade and on commerce generally. Bahrain began the production of oil long before the other states (Kuwait 1946, Qatar 1949, Abu Dhabi 1961) and therefore developed a health and education system in advance of the other Gulf entities. It also had a history of political opposition longer than in any other state.

On the other hand Bahraini oil production is low - a mere thousandth of what it is in Kuwait, for example. Moreover, oil production is expected to cease altogether in around 1990. This means that the regime has not been able and in future will not be able, to guarantee its citizens the kinds of material benefits found in other small states which have much higher oil revenues. The absence of such monies has had another significant effect, in that the demand for labour has been relatively less than in other states, with the consequence that despite the import of foreign labour, this immigrant labour is a much smaller proportion of the total than elsewhere. In contrast to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Abu Dhabi and Dubai, the majority of the working class in Bahrain remain Bahraini citizens. This means that the workers are less vulnerable than are immigrants to government pressure. It is therefore these two considerations - the limited capacities of the government, the predominantly indigenous character of the working class - which set Bahrain apart and help to explain why a stronger workers' movement has emerged.

In an attempt to diversify out of oil and at the same time absorb the surplus skilled labour in the population, the regime has promoted other economic ventures. The three main industrial activities are refining, aluminium smelting and a dry dock which is under construction. The BAPCO refinery gets



two-thirds of its oil from Saudi Arabia and has been the scene of some of the most important strikes in Bahraini history. The aluminium smelter, A L B A , uses local gas to process ore brought from Australia; it was completed in 1971 and there have been several strikes there, both during the construction and the production phases. The dry dock is designed to fulfill two functions: on the one hand, it is part of the plan by Arab oil producers to have and service their own tanker fleet; on the other hand, the other richer producers are investing in Bahrain, at least partly to increase the prosperity of that state and thereby reduce social conflicts. The regime is worried by predictions that in the early 1980s there will be a serious surplus of those leaving school over the jobs available, and it is therefore concerned to expand the industrial and financial activities to absorb this labour.

The political history of Bahrain has reflected this early and atypical economic growth. In the pre-oil period there were several major conflicts between the ruling family and the merchants, and between workers and shipowners in the pearling industry; British power guaranteed that the regime remained intact. In the postwar period there have been three main periods of opposition. The first, from 1954 to 1956, saw the growth of a mass movement supporting Egypt and opposed to British rule in Bahrain. The second, in 1965, was centred in the BAPCO refinery and led to many arrests. The third has been in the current decade - in 1970, 1972, and 1974.

This workers' opposition has grown against the backdrop of other political changes. Britain ruled until August 1971, when Bahrain became formally independent. Up to that time there were no representative institutions of any kind. Following independence, the ruling family tried to broaden its base of support. Merchants were incorporated into the Cabinet, and in 1972 elections for a Constitutional Assembly were held. Finally, in December 1973, 30 members of a new National Assembly were elected.

The activities of this Assembly were highly restricted. As with the similar one in Kuwait, it was powerless to change government policy. Moreover, women were prevented from voting for it. Yet a number of criticisms were heard, through 8 progressive MPs elected. At the same time there was a renewal of workers' activity; between January and June 1974 there were 28 separate strikes in Bahrain. On 1st May the workers publicly celebrated May Day for the first time. The government then struck back: on 25 June, they arrested 27 workers and intellectuals, including one MP, Dr. Abdulhadi Khalaf. Whilst all but three were released in the ensuing nine months, conflict between the regime and the opposition continued. In particular the opposition were calling for the legalisation of trades unions and of strikes. The regime for its part introduced a new State Security Law, under which the Minister of the Interior could hold any person without trial for up to three years.

The regime finally dispensed with the National Assembly altogether in August 1975. It chose to strike at a propitious moment - in the middle of summer and during Ramada - when it would be most difficult for any coherent resistance to emerge. Since then an unknown number of people have been arrested and detained. Two members of the opposition - Mohammed Ghulum and Said Al-Awainati - have reportedly been killed in prison.

The following text, written some months after the National Assembly was suspended, details the changes in Bahraini society and the factors leading up to the August 1975 coup. It would seem that there are at least four different elements within the Bahraini opposition: the elements grouped in the Popular Front in Bahrain, who have authored the following text; a communist group in the Bahrain National Liberation Front; a Ba'athi grouping, which at least earlier in the 1970s was close to Iraq; and a force of left-wing Nationalists opposed to the al-Khalifa family but not affiliated to any of the other three groups. The PFB itself is a continuation of earlier

formations; it was originally part of the pan-Arab Arab Nationalist movement, and in 1968 it merged with other ANM groups to form the People's Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arab Gulf. In 1974, following more general changes in the region, PFLOAG separated into different groups, among them the People's Front in Bahrain and the People's Front for the Liberation of Oman (PFLO). Despite organisational changes, solidarity between the two movements has continued.

The People's Front's analysis of the August 1975 events emphasised the following points:

- the development of the 'open door' policy and the reasons for it,
- the special problems arising from the recent boom in the fields of labour, housing, prices and health,
- the ambiguous character of the National Assembly as at once an instrument of the regime's policy and a platform for the opposition,
- the change in the international context of Bahrain: from being controlled by Britain it is now under US influence, with Saudi Arabia and Iran playing the most active role in integrating the country into a broader Gulf capitalist system.

It is perhaps this final point that is most important as far as outside analysis of Bahrain is concerned. The British financial stake in Bahrain remains and a British officer, Henderson, still runs the Special Branch (i.e. secret police). But Bahrain has switched to the USA for military supplies, far more than any other Gulf state formerly ruled by Britain, and has a US naval base at al-Jufair in the suburbs of the Bahraini capital, Manama. Al-Jufair is, however, in some ways a distraction: the US' strategic needs - naval, aerial electronic reconnaissance - are met by the base on the Indian Ocean island of Diego Garcia, whilst external intervention into Bahrain, in the event of a revolutionary situation developing, would be by Saudi Arabia and/or Iran, not by the USA. Al-Jufair has more a political than an operational significance and it may indeed be reduced or even phased out in the near future. The USA might however retain landing rights for its navy, parallel to the air landing rights it has recently acquired on the Omani island of Masirah.

It is in the roles of Saudi Arabia and Iran that the true vulnerability of Bahrain is most evident, since these two countries dominate the state and will not allow the al-Khalifa regime to be overthrown. The Saudis are widely believed to have encouraged the attack on the National Assembly in 1975. For its part, Iran has a special and continuing relation with Bahrain. In 1970 the Shah agreed to end Iran's claim to Bahrain as Iran's Fourteenth Province, but the Iranian presence in the country's economic and political life remains considerable. In return for dropping the claim to Bahrain, Iran made four demands: first, that Iran could lease the Moharraq air base after the British withdrew; secondly, that Bahrain should not federate with Kuwait; thirdly, that Bahrain should not interfere in Iran's claim to the three Gulf islands; and fourth, that Bahrain should open itself to Iranian immigrants and goods. Even though the first demand was not met, the other three have been, and there can be little doubt that were Saudi Arabia to be unable to suppress a revolutionary movement in Bahrain, Iran would quickly intervene to do so.

Bahrain is therefore both the scene of the most advanced workers' movement in the Gulf, and closely integrated with the other, much richer and more powerful, regional forces. We hope that this study will draw attention to the special position which Bahrain occupies, to the forces operating on it, and to the underpublicised struggles of the Bahraini people.

THE EVENTS OF AUGUST 1975 AND THE CRISIS OF THE BAHRAINI REGIME.

THE AUGUST ONSLAUGHT

On August 23, 1975, the al-Khalifa regime arrested a large number of the members of the Nationalist movement in Bahrain. It dissolved the National Assembly and suspended parts of the constitution. It also announced the enactment of the repressive State Security Law which already had been rejected by the National Assembly and by public opinion. The moment the new Law took effect, the regime called out its repressive forces - the Special Branch, the police, the riot squads, and even the National Guard. It was as if the country had declared war. Houses were raided, and innocent people assaulted in the streets. This was done in complete disregard not only of the International Charter of Human Rights but even of Bahrain's own constitution, promulgated in 1973. All this bears out the revolutionary movement's belief that any laws and any constitution initiated by this regime, however fine they sound, will be abrogated whenever necessary, and that the regime will never abandon rule by decree, which it will use to justify its new policies.

The authorities arrested and tortured people without presenting them before the courts. In addition they made use of the local media, and those in the Arab world as well as religious preachers and other apologists to present a favourable image of their police-state policies. As a part of this intense propaganda offensive against the nationalist movement, the government dispensed promises that it would solve the problems of inflation and housing shortage and would provide new forms of democracy hitherto unknown in Bahrain!

This time the authorities wanted to deal a decisive blow at the nationalist movement as a whole, in particular at the People's Front in Bahrain and the Bahrain National Liberation Front. They harped on the danger of communism and the importance of the religious sector in maintaining stability, the danger of atheism and of workers and students getting involved in politics and other such slogans.

The events of August proved the bankruptcy of the authorities in the face of the economic, political and social problems suffered by the masses whether in the field of civil liberties or housing, food, or essential services. It also revealed how far the regime is at odds with the developing workers' movement which continues to demand its legitimate right to form trade unions and professional associations; the movement also demands political rights for women, freedom for the individual and an end to the power of the Special Branch and all other hangovers of British rule. The regime's inability to crush the nationalist movement led to the exposure of the role it wanted the National Assembly to play in forcing the Nationalist movement into the open while remaining a tool in the hands of the authorities. Thus the imperialist and local reactionary forces can no longer depend on the Assembly to legitimise their own resolutions and decisions, and to increase the desire of compradors, property owners and prominent members of the ruling

family for quick unrestricted profits. The increasing contradictions which accompanied the Assembly's two-year life (1973-75), and the imperialist plans for establishing the security and stability of its monopolies in the Gulf region, made the piecemeal reforms which were essential in the early 1970s unable to keep up with the immense developments in the infrastructure of contradictions between the exploiter and exploited classes. Nor could they keep up with the enormous changes in imperialist plans for the organisation of affairs in the Gulf region.

The contradictions came to a head over the question of the State Security Law, which was rejected by the masses, their nationalist forces and the Assembly itself. Given the tribalistic repressive nature of the regime, the only way the regime could solve all these contradictions was to launch a wave of arrests, dissolve the National Assembly and suspend parts of the constitution. This was done in greater style than previously as Khalifa bin Salman, the Prime Minister, behaved like a caricature of a dictator who, finding his options limited by the activities of the workers' and democratic movements, prohibits all freedom. He imposed a police state which struck at the national democratic movement under the excuse of attacking communists and saboteurs *'who want to weaken the national economy and delay the victorious march of independence'* as the Prime Minister claimed in a number of recent press statements.

The measures taken by the regime are not *ad hoc* decisions. They are neither the result of some prince's wish to advance his own standing in the ruling family's internal struggles, nor are they designed to satisfy some security officer's thirst for repression. The measures have come as a result of increased contradictions and conflicts between class forces: on the one hand forces who want to turn Bahrain into a financial centre - a new Singapore - and who want to acquire more brokerages and agencies and consequently more commissions and profits. On the other hand the popular forces who have been crushed by the confiscation of their property, the systematic removal of our national wealth and potential by imperialism (especially US imperialism) and the denial of elementary rights. They have suffered increasing suppression in every field as a result of the government's policies at the national and international levels.

A study of the recent economic and social situation and its political reflection and an analysis of the political programmes adopted in recent years are sufficient to explain the actions of the regime. It is possible to understand the regime's promises and reforms which have been, and still are, publicised as solutions to the housing, inflation, and communications problems etc. as well as to the central problems of democratic freedom and national sovereignty. Thus we will not only be in a position to challenge misleading propaganda but also erroneous idealist interpretations and mechanistic analyses which do not accurately observe the course of local and Gulf events in defining the correct political positions from which to reply to the regime's tactics, but rather depend on the politics of reaction and illusion characteristic of the reformists.

THE NEW IMPERIALIST STRATEGY AND ITS APPLICATION TO BAHRAIN

Ever since the British withdrew from the Gulf, imperialist circles have been making efforts to compensate the financial losses experienced by their local puppets as a result of the withdrawal of British military bases. The method followed has been an 'open door' policy towards all foreign capital and monopolies.

This policy in the Gulf is marked by the success of US imperialist pressure on its British ally since the Twenties. The British used to depend on a 'closed door' policy, with treaties denying any ruler the right to deal with another country without reference to the British Political Resident or adviser. That applied to external affairs and internal ones such as the disposal of oil or mineral wealth. It is also a result of complete British acceptance of, and submission to, the changes that have taken place in the balance of international forces in the imperialist camp since the Second World War, when US imperialism emerged as the strongest imperialist force in history leading the protection of imperialism against the rising tide of liberation movements in the colonies and the semi-colonies against the socialist countries and the working class movement of the capitalist countries. At the same time, as is the imperialist practice - it forces its allies into retreat so that it can enjoy the lion's share of the Third World's raw materials and domination over its markets.

Ever since the Twenties, the Gulf has been the scene of that US/British struggle. While the fortunes of US monopolies and capital rose alongside growing US influence in Saudi Arabia and Iran, British influence was rapidly declining. The USA, given all the internal changes in the Arab Gulf states and on the international level, could no longer afford to leave others to protect imperialism's most important strategic region. It began to formulate plan after plan to control the Gulf and protect all imperialist interests and especially its own. The 'open door policy' slogan was used persistently by the Americans to impose their policy on their allies.

We do not intend to provide a study of the Anglo-American struggle in the Gulf and the many factors which led Britain to announce her decision to withdraw in 1968, but rather to indicate new imperialist directions in the region and the influence of the new American direction on the general situation and its specific developments in Bahrain. This policy which opened the door to more foreign monopolies and capital has been increasingly condoned by the local reactionary classes and particularly by the Bahraini ruling family who, for many years, have lived in the shadow of British rule; it was so terrified that it offered financial enticements to keep British troops and consequent British protection. But it has since discovered that there is a place for it in the new order and that it can rely on US imperialism and its major allies in the area. The Bahraini property owners and compradors have also discovered that there are possibilities and opportunities for them to increase their profits by acting as agents for the monopolies and, if Bahrain is transformed into a service centre for the whole Gulf they can benefit from the restrictions imposed by the reactionaries in the other Amirates. Thus Bahrain has become a centre of prostitution, nightclubs as well as of 'innocent' tourism where the bosses from other parts of the Gulf gather at weekends.

Starting in 1968 and increasingly since 1971, the authorities have promulgated a number of laws encouraging the entry of foreign capital and monopolies into Bahrain. The favourite slogan among officials and especially in the Ministry of Development has become 'better services, better facilities, better guarantees ... than those found in the other Amirates'. Our country and the other Amirates are being sold by public auction. Competition between the statelets of the Gulf to attract customers and to entice businessmen to steal our oil wealth and its benefits is greater than the competition to consolidate independence and establish national sovereignty. It is not surprising to hear one day that the biggest airport in the Middle East will be built in this Amirate, and the next that another Amirate is planning to build an even bigger airport and to expand its existing facilities to enable Concorde to land. This competition extends to ports, satellites, dry docks, aluminium smelters, etc., so that economic anarchy is the practical result of the tendencies and inclinations of the reactionary Gulf regimes and

and especially the Bahraini authorities who are envious of their neighbours' oil revenues, while their own are rapidly being exhausted. They see no other way of keeping up with the other sheikhs than by turning Bahrain into the Hong Kong and Singapore of the Gulf, encouraging tourism and the service industries while at the same time these authorities are incapable of offering the slightest service to the local population. This led a British expert working for a Consultancy¹ firm to wonder whether 'Bahrain is the refuse dump of the Gulf States'.

THE REGIME'S INDUSTRIALISATION PLANS

In this field, the regime's policy concentrates on servicing foreign monopolies: this is clear from a look at the major industrial plants - the Bahrain Petroleum Company (BAPCO), and Aluminium Bahrain (ALBA).

With regard to the oil industry, the government has failed to supervise this important national wealth. When oil revenues increased in the other Gulf states, the government's sole concern was to compare local production with Gulf production: it had no plan to ultimately benefit from this regional wealth by setting up petrochemical industries, or by using the gas which was being wastefully flared.

BAPCO's refinery policy served the interests of the British and US fleets operating in the Indian Ocean. The refinery also played a major part in supplying fuel to American fleets and planes during the Vietnam war. Similarly Saudi oil which supplies 2/3 of the refining capacity was used in the same way as it satisfied the fuel requirements of military bases and was used to service civilian planes which helped to turn Bahrain into a base in the network of air communications, satisfying the fuel needs of the local and Gulf markets which rose with the increase in the number of cars, power stations and other fuel-consuming systems.

When the oil producing countries called for control over their oil wealth by participation or nationalisation, the Bahraini regime took a back seat, basing its attitude on the most reactionary examples in the field. Thus they followed Saudi Arabia, demanding 60% participation after long hesitation. The government's position became clear when the participation agreement was debated in the National Assembly. The Minister of Development declared that Bahrain had not accepted and applied the participation agreement because *"the posted prices of oil and the suggested structure of participation did not proffer encouraging results concerning returns on investment in the case of Bahrain. If we apply the participation agreement and invest the required capital we must ask what return we get on this capital. At the 1973 posted prices returns on capital would have been under 10% which means that if we went to BAPCO and bought stocks to the tune of 40 or 50 million Dinars, the interest would only have been 8% at a time when internationally interest rates were running at 10-15%. In 1974, now that the price of the oil has risen by three to four hundred percent, the returns from participation will be worthwhile since the interest on any sum we pay will be around 30%."*²

The Minister of Development imagines that people are so stupid that he can fool them when he says: *"We expect to reduce production in the Bahrain field from 70,000 barrels to 10,000 barrels during the next 15 years."*³ This is like someone who invests in a hotel and begins to knock it down floor by floor, i.e. the capital paid now as a share in participation will give us ever decreasing quantities of oil in the next fifteen or twenty years.

Whereas the government currently holds 60% of the shares of this company, it does not know where its share of oil has gone as the thief has become the accountant of the master's possessions. The joint management council has yet to be appointed. As for the announcement of the National Oil Company it will remain a field for employing bureaucrats without them doing anything. It will conceal the true nature of the relationship between the authorities and the main officials in the colonial BAPCO.

ALBA reveals the true face of the authorities' industrialisation policies. We will examine it through the words of the officials who are behind this economic policy and who have supervised it for some time. The Minister of Development says: *"Our concern centred on two points: first to create an industry dependent on natural gas, second to provide jobs. The state was thinking of about 1200 workers and 40 million cubic feet of gas per day."*⁴

The aluminium project was linked to British withdrawal in as much as it was conceived in 1967. British and American circles began to work at establishing gas related industries with three aims: - to compensate for the withdrawal of the British bases at the employment level, - to ensure comprador and landowners profits - and to improve the regime's image by giving it the opportunity to show its concern for development.

The Minister of Development stated that: *"A number of international companies have shown an interest in industrialising Bahrain and using the gas. The government's share is 2.5%. Three companies each have 25%, two have 5% and one 12.5% of the capital. They offered us 2.5% and we accepted as a sign of encouragement. During the negotiations one of the major groups in the first stage dropped out on the grounds that less than 60 tons production would not provide a viable economic return. At that time, we had two options: either to build sister companies like power stations and a port and rent them to the company, thus reducing the burden of investment on the partners, or to take up partnership. We opted for the 25% and in this way the government's share became 27.5%. In the last year, the British companies dropped out and the government was forced to buy up their shares, thus raising its holding to 39.5%."* As for the value of shares which the government of Bahrain will buy, the money has been borrowed from British banks at an interest of over 4%.

What are the returns of this factory which took the lives of many workers during its construction and has taken more since, as a result of the lack of safety provisions, as it is one of the oldest types of aluminium smelters in the world? The Minister added: *"The Companies involved in ALBA did not want to compete with the international aluminium industry monopolised by four or five American companies, but they wanted to produce sufficient quantity for their own use. This was no incentive for the government to enter a competitive market, so we asked the companies to take responsibility for marketing the Bahraini government's share, and this was done. On this basis, we were content with a very low return on investment in 1971, 72 and 73. Looking at the bad situation in the world economy, we had hoped to make around 40 Dinars a ton. But the price went down to about 20D per ton which means we, and the other shareholders lost 30-40D per ton during the three years (ALBA producing 120,000 tons per day was losing 3.7-4.7 million Dinars, and since the government share was about 40%, it was losing 1.44-1.92 million Dinars annually."*⁵

This Minister who knows all about profitable projects adds that the General Cables Company began to lose on its investment and thus wanted to sell its shares; it offered them to its partners, but found no buyers. The government volunteered to buy the shares which amounted to 3%. *"We did not have the money or inclination to buy a large quantity of shares, equal to 20,000 tons of aluminium per year, which we did not know how to market. We offered the shares to a Japanese company, and indeed, the deal was about to go through*

*in November and December, when some basic developments took place increasing the price of aluminium and the price of oil, giving the government both liquidity and optimism, that we would not lose in selling aluminium. In the light of such considerations, the government decided to buy these shares."*⁶

There is no doubt that these statements show clearly the tendencies of the government's attitude to industry. They can be summarised as follows:

1. Because there is an abundance of natural gas, the government is prepared to offer it at give-away prices if not gratis, in order to tempt foreign companies to participate in the ALBA project. Companies interested in the metal have found in the Ministry of Development exactly what they are looking for. The government buys most of the shares. This has happened in the recent period. By the end of 1975, the Government share had reached 77.9% when the companies found that they did better by buying the metal rather than by losing on the refining process. Thus the government offers gas cheaply or free to this factory, and bears the burden of the consequent losses.
2. Since the losses are covered by oil revenues and foreign aid, the greatest advantage from the presence of the factory is to the middleman who acts as broker in the share selling operation as well as to the compradors whose profits increase in relation with the increased presence of these companies. The profits of the real estate owners also increase because they can squeeze to the marrow the hundreds of British and European experts and foreign workers.
3. The government is prepared to pay compensation to companies 'who suffer losses' to persuade them to continue their operations, while it refuses to participate in the oil industry which is the backbone of the national income because the monopolies do not require this kind of assistance. Rather, in the oil industry, assistance to the monopolies comes in allowing them to play around with production, prices and marketing without any supervision or participation.

The foreign companies involved in the Aluminium project want the pure metal from which there are millions to be made. So they bring the raw material and refine it in Bahrain where the government bears all the losses and sells it back to the aluminium companies. Such a policy would be out of the question anywhere except in a Gulf Amirate.

The real industrial policy of the government rests in the services sector. An observer needs only to look at the numerous 'industries' in the free zone to see whose interests are served by this government's economic policy. Most companies in the construction business use Bahrain as a centre as it enjoys good facilities, cheap labour, no taxes; from there they undertake construction projects required by the oil companies, like floating platforms, etc. for anywhere from Malaysia to Saudi Arabia. Leaders in the field are Jackson Marine, Middle East Engineering, Basrik, Philip Houseman.

In other fields there are many companies who dominate vital institutions and facilities like Cable and Wireless, Gulf Air, Sharqiya, Laing Wimpey, George Wimpey. Most of these companies practise a viciously exploitative policy against the workers. This is done with the cooperation of state officials. Should a workers' strike occur, they use all kinds of tricks to deal with it, they may even go as far as to transfer their business to other Emirates if things don't turn out to their liking! They are supported by the Special Branch which has no qualms about arresting workers' leaders or harrassing them and blacklisting them with the other countries so that 'strike fever will not increase' in the country.

The policy of chasing fast profits also includes local contractors: companies have been created by partnerships between foreign companies and local contractors, like OALCO, although the policy followed by the government with regard to foreigners has alienated wide sectors among local businessmen who object to the government's favouritism towards foreign companies. The government has allowed Americans to compete with small local businessmen as in the case of a Mr Cumming who found support in official circles. But in recent years the Gulf states have attempted to improve Bahrain's bad situation by helping its government to reach the economic level of the other oil sheikhdoms by means of Joint Arab Projects such as the dry dock project.

These large scale projects assist the development of the working class and the increase of its numbers. They also help in uniting the area and thus uniting the local and Arab working class. But the aim of such projects at present is to bolster up the regime in the face of nationalist opposition and to help it to take more repressive measures under the cover of false slogans. Thus the regime will be rescued from its economic crisis which is a product of its class nature and of the profligacy of leading members of the ruling family and senior officials in spending oil revenues. Saudi Arabia plays a big role in this. As well as supporting the reactionary Bahraini regime by establishing some joint Gulf projects in Bahrain, it also gave the Abu Sa'fa field as a gift - which this year yielded an income of some 50 million Dinars.

The ruling classes represented by the ruling family, the compradors and the main real estate owners who see no possibility of maintaining the status quo without further and closer association with imperialism have to operate with a limited field of operation by comparison with that of their brothers in other oil producing countries. Consequently they have limited horizons, are absorbed in their reactionary state and are totally opposed to the aspirations of the masses. They are afraid of any serious industrialisation policy in oil or any other field, and they only get involved in this type of operation to satisfy their imperialist masters. Whereas the Gulf states' oil industry, is moving in a specific direction, the Bahrain government, while seeking help from the others in the form of setting up industrial projects in Bahrain, views with anxiety the flood of workers who pour into the dry dock project and its related companies. Henderson and his gang show a growing fear of the development of the working class situation; he sees only one solution to the situation, hiring more agents, increasing repression and terrorisation, proscribing civil liberties. This is what we have suffered since the dissolution of the National Assembly.

THE COMMERCIAL BOOM

Officials are constantly pointing out that in the oil producing Gulf, Bahrain's role is that of a transit and services centre. This claim is supported by Bahrain's major commercial role in former times when it was a trade centre, prior to the discovery of oil; after that its trade benefited greatly from transit activities.

We will not study here the development of trade, but this aspect of social and political change is fundamental to relations between imperialist countries and the Gulf. The increased volume of trade explains the position of the comprador class in the present political discussion.

British withdrawal and increased US interest in the Gulf had an impact at all levels and especially in trade. Trade with the US increased the volume of imports from the US overtaking those from Britain for the first time in the

history of Bahrain. The relative trade can be seen in table number 1.

TABLE 1. IMPORTS FROM WESTERN COUNTRIES ('000 Dinars)

	1965	1968	1971	1973	1974
Britain	9,936	12,735	31,754	24,148	25,726
U.S.A.	5,213	6,289	12,630	17,648	31,866
Japan	3,221	8,248	12,793	15,119	23,178
F.R.Germany	1,573	2,239	4,155	5,150	8,257
Total (all countries)	38,747	52,021	105,005	217,819	175,877

The increased volume of trade is related to the rapprochement with the Americans who want to transform Bahrain into a base for their aggressive strategy in the Middle East. As a result they are building up trade. Government philosophy is currently that Bahrain lives off the smell of oil and therefore must benefit from it in the trading and banking sectors even if it means crushing the popular classes and obliging them to live in backward conditions as long as the interests of the traders, the ruling family and the foreign companies remain assured.

The massive increase in imports in the last ten, and especially in the last five years, reflects the enormous interest derived by the big businessmen and real estate dealers. They are increasingly allying their interests with those of members of the ruling family. They take a united stand in defence of the open door policy, free trade, and non intervention of the state.

If the import statistics clearly indicate a growing relationship with American imperialism and an influx of consumer commodities, the authorities' banking policy exposes another face of the *wide-open door* policy. The banks are not required to put their wealth to work in projects inside the country - nor are they required - as is the case with other foreign institutions - to pay income tax. Foreign businessmen are not required to pay any taxes while they benefit from considerable facilities which they would not find elsewhere.

The Premier has said: *"We are a country with many facilities, we are concerned to encourage foreign companies and capital to work in our country. The movement of capital within the country will benefit our Bahraini people. We have built air and sea ports of international standards so that Bahrain will become a link in a chain of activity."*⁸ Before the August attack there were already over twenty banks and insurance companies, including Chartered Bank, British Bank of the Middle East, Grindlay's Bank, First National City Bank, Chase Manhattan, Continental, Algemene Bank, Iran Export Bank, Bank Melli of Iran, Habib Bank; there were also bank registered under Arab names.

But after the August Events, the authorities opened the door even wider, offering the banks wide-ranging facilities and allowing them to turn Bahrain into a banking centre, offering long and medium term loans and working with the government and other institutions basically undertaking financial operations outside Bahrain. The most important of the fifteen banks who have asked to work under these conditions are the Bank of America, American Express, International Bank, National Westminster Bank, Chase Manhattan, First National City Bank.

It is clear that the American banks which had made Beirut a regional centre for their Middle East operations have begun to transfer to Bahrain as a base for the Gulf and the whole Middle East. Bahraini officials do not conceal their joy at the events in Lebanon which have made their facilities competitive to American and imperialist banks and companies. They justify their attack on the nationalist movement by saying they wanted to control¹⁰ the situation so that a battle with the left like in Lebanon wouldn't occur.

The policy of offering more services is revealed in the expansion of the airport, the port, radio and wireless services, the building of more luxury hotels, and the eagerness of the government to offer every facility to the Cable and Wireless Company (UK) and the British Overseas company: these agreements go against the national interest and are made in return for personal benefits for some big merchants and members of the ruling family. The statistics in Table 2 show the extent of the expansion of communications in the fields of air and sea services and wireless communications; it excludes the channels of communications used by shipping companies and the US fleet, as it is part of the open door policy not to intervene in the affairs of oil and shipping companies, many of whom are engaged in spying activities.

TABLE 2 COMMUNICATIONS SERVICES

	1965	1968	1971	1972	1973	1974
Telex	10,869	48,180	215,843	289,160	413,224	560,078
Radio telephone	106,332	123,383	243,482	865,287	1120,012	1448,705
Transit planes		15,817	13,239	19,088	25,917	23,864
Ships		532	597	660	662	587

The transformation of Bahrain into a base for American businessmen and other capitalists has also become obvious in the provision of a greater number of luxury hotels. In the last few years nine hotels have been built including the Gulf Hotel and the Hilton which are managed by foreign companies. Currently more land is being prepared for building hotels like the Sheraton and residential buildings for foreign businessmen.

ECONOMIC RELATIONS WITH THE ARAB GULF STATES

The government's policy centres on the fact that Bahrain has a higher population density than the other Amirates, a more advanced education system, and greater political consciousness among the population. The government wants to use these advantages to advance its political options and to realise the aims of Bahraini reaction. When they talk of population density, they mean that the problem of unemployment must be dealt with: in truth, the absence of jobs is not a result of lack of opportunities, but of the policy of dividing the working class and of importing foreign temporary labour, which can be exploited by the monopolies without fear of strikes or protests. And when they talk of the level of education and political consciousness, it is not because they accept the demands of the masses and intend to give the people their democratic rights, but it is because they want to assist the reactionaries, and built up their strength to preserve the interests of the compradors, property speculators and senior officials who look with envy at their

brothers in the Gulf who are wealthier than they are. When oil wealth increased in the other Amirates, Bahraini reactionaries looked enviously at their counterparts in the other Amirates and wanted to reach their standards of wealth. Khalifa bin Salman stated: *"We are surrounded by rich states like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq and others, but we are not jealous, for we are brothers, there is a blood relationship between us. But our citizens (not the Sheikhs and compradors!!!) look at these states and their peoples and want the same benefits and way of life"*¹¹.

Bahraini reactionaries, like their counterparts in the Gulf, oppose any strengthening of the relations between the peoples of the area, as they fear cooperation between the workers and the popular movements. But they found this policy impossible given the economic developments in the region as a whole and the growth of popular hostility to the tribal and feudalistic mentality of the Amirates' rulers, and because of the latter's need to rescue each other from crippling crises. The rescue programme has centred on Bahrain and the Sultanate of Oman.

Faced with growing opposition from the petit bourgeoisie, the working class and other popular sectors, these rulers have found that one available escape route is to exploit these groups in the interests of other Gulf reactionaries. So Bahrain began to export teachers and civil servants to the Gulf and Oman, where the Intelligence Services keep a careful watch on them.

At the economic level, the rich Amirates and Saudi Arabia began to set up projects and aid programmes to extricate Bahrain from its housing and unemployment crises by giving financial aid to the Sheikhs so they can live at the same level as their Gulf brothers. It explains the joint economic projects - the cement factory, the causeway, the dry dock, in addition to the abolition of customs duties between the two countries, and massive financial assistance towards the housing programme.

Kuwait has followed this policy with the aim of linking the Amirates by a joint Shipping company, joint banks and other projects they have suggested to the other Amirates since 1972. If this tendency expresses the aspirations of the propertied Kuwaiti bourgeoisie and commercial sectors for greater profits in land speculation and financial deals, it frightens Bahraini businessmen (comprador and real estate holders), who cannot compete¹² with the Kuwaiti capitalists and indeed have called for more protection.

The revolutionary movement is not opposed to joint projects by the Gulf statelets, especially in the economic field. A joint market, the abolition of customs restrictions and the legal barriers which divide the peoples of the region, are all factors which will assist necessary social change and help improve coordination of the workers' movement. But at the same time we are aware of the fact that the reactionaries are working to save each other by offering aid, and harmonisation and by reducing some interstate hostilities. They are using their immense oil wealth, the relatively low density of population and the experience of Arab reactionaries to create a repressive apparatus against the revolutionary movement.

Therefore the joint projects and subsidies serve wider social strata than previously and in the present circumstances they help the ruling clique to face the revolutionary movement. The rulers claim to offer genuine solutions to the housing problems and inflation, while they blame the revolutionary movement for creating more headaches. But we are completely confident that the sharp contradictions between the people and the ruling clique and their imperialist controllers cannot be solved by half hearted solutions to all the pressing problems which face us. So the regime is always waving the big stick in the face of the people, adopting laws and strategies which isolate the peoples of the Gulf from each other, while

at the very same time, the rulers are unifying their security systems and intelligence services. The revolutionary movement also fully appreciates the inability of the reactionaries and their tribalistic families to transcend their objective reality and to behave according to the interests of the people, since that would end the basis of their existence. Thus these ruling families push on with projects from which they and their partners benefit. However as we have seen in the case of the Kuwaiti and Bahraini property dealers, the contradictions are rapidly developing within the establishment.

While the reactionary regimes surrounding Bahrain are keen to assist in the solution of Bahraini regime's problems by offering some relief for the people who are suffering severe economic and political difficulties, this relief and aid mainly end up in the pockets of money mad leading members of the ruling family, major compradors and land owners. So, in spite of the August anti-democratic coup and fantastic claim that the living problems of the masses have been solved, even newspapers who are most loyal to the regime have been unable to remain silent for long about the scandals which have been revealed by seven months of empty promises.

Al Adwa, a newspaper close to the government stated: "State projects are not proceeding as they should. Most, if not all, of them are being implemented with the slowness of a tortoise. There are projects which have come about after expert feasibility studies, which have been approved by advisory institutions, whose designs have been fixed, and whose budgets have been determined on the basis of the time necessary for completion. Of course, the experts and the consultants have taken their share of the costs, the engineers and designers have taken their exorbitant fees, but the projects have not been implemented. All those studies and designs have rapidly been consigned to forgotten files and dusty drawers ... state funds have been wasted ... When these projects are resurrected to see the light of day again, they will need new studies and new finance... A project which would have cost a mere 2 million¹³ after all the obstacles have been overcome will cost 6 million or more."

SOCIAL EFFECTS: LABOUR IMPORTS AND HOUSING SHORTAGES

LABOUR IMPORTS AND THE STRUGGLE FOR UNIONISATION.

As a result of the open door policy, construction companies, banks, insurance companies, oil monopolies and many other types of companies have flooded in to plunder our wealth and to make Bahrain the operational centre for draining the wealth of the region and its oil revenues. The local bourgeoisie's first concern has been to act as intermediary in return for specific commissions. They have also begun to turn their attention to all the fields of service required by these companies. The labour market was an open field for massive profits. Many companies were formed to import foreign labour, especially from India and Pakistan. These importers received considerable assistance from senior officials in the Ministry of Labour and others to get around the laws decreed by the authorities to prevent such criminal activities. The government itself has been involved in this field. In 1972, the Minister of Development announced that the government intended to import 7,000 skilled workers from Pakistan¹⁴. Statistics issued by the Ministry of Labour indicate that 5,790 workers obtained Bahraini entry visas between January and August 1975 alone. The vicious exploitation and the injustice suffered by foreign workers, especially Indians, has forced their governments to place stringent conditions on emigration to the Gulf. This, in turn, forced the Minister of Labour in the August government to go to India to negotiate with the Indian authorities and to agree a specific procedure for importing workers.

The government's fumbling, anarchic policy in this field, based on *laissez faire* and open door, does not enable it - even given an energetic administrative apparatus instead of this flabby ruling class - to predict the future situation. Since there are no regulations concerning participation in trade or investment, it is impossible to predict the social consequences, however much officials present themselves to us as competent forecasters. Each statement they make contradicts another one. Since the government's effective policy is to allow complete freedom in labour relations, companies, businessmen and senior officials tend to import more and more workers, justifying their actions in the following way:

- The Bahraini worker is less skilled than his foreign counterpart.
- There is no local labour force able to fulfil the requirements of the considerable industrialisation and construction plans for the country.
- The Bahraini worker cannot take the same workload as a foreigner! The Bahraini worker is accused of being negligent.

A sound economic policy is one which is built on the country's human and material resources and works for the further development of human resources, using education to supply the requirements of the objectives of its economic policy. In spite of over 55 years of education in Bahrain, the level of illiteracy is 60% in a country whose population is only a quarter of a million and whose oil revenues are over 131 million Dinars. The following statistics reveal the extent of the regime's real concern with this matter, despite their protestations that 20% of the 1971 budget was spent on education.

TABLE 3. ADULT ILLITERACY RATE ¹⁵

	1959			1965			1971		
	illit.	total	%	illit.	total	%	illit.	total	%
Men	30,964	47,258	65.5	37,569	58,800	64.1	34,598	68,162	51
Women	31,291	36,114	87	35,158	43,993	72.2	37,380	52,276	71
Total	62,255	73,372	74.8	72,727	101,793	71.8	71,978	120,438	60

This high level of illiteracy has not led the government to launch a widespread literacy campaign or to take measures to raise general educational standards. On the contrary, it has found it better to take as an example the bankrupt programmes applied in Saudi Arabia, bringing teachers and experts to develop the educational programme in Bahrain. Their only concern in this field is to serve their propaganda purposes.

Meanwhile the national potential is wasted either for political reasons or for reasons invented by foreign and local businessmen and the Ministry of Labour to keep a large section of the masses outside the labour market. Even worse is the increasing neglect of women in Bahrain: they are treated with contempt and not allowed the opportunity to be productive members of society. Employment policy can be seen in Table 4. These figures do not reveal the whole truth, since thousands of Bahraini workers and foreigners are unemployed or employed on a temporary basis which allows bosses and especially contractors to hire and fire them as they please. These workers get no support from the Ministry of Labour, except perhaps a transfer to another company within a pre-arranged game played by senior officials and foreign company managers and contractors.

TABLE 4. ADULTS ACCORDING TO OCCUPATION 1971¹⁶

	Economically active			econom. inact- ive	stu- dents	unemp- loyed	total	%
	working	unemployed						
		total	seeking work for 1st time					
Bahraini	36,477	1,473	572	59,036	11,243	49,266	96,986	51
Men	34,677	1,425	535	12,825	6,716	7,534	48,927	15.5
Women	1,800	48	37	46,211	4,527	41,732	48,059	87
Foreigners	21,997	354	139	6,619	697	6,276	28,970	28.8
Men	20,612	338	134	892	387	842	20,842	4
Women	1,385	16	5	5,727	310	5,432	7,127	76
Total	58,474	1,827	711	65,655	11,940	55,542	125,956	44.3

To clarify the situation of employment policy more fully, the following figures present the development of employment since 1959 according to government statistics. (tables 5 and 6)

TABLE 5. BAHRAINI AND FOREIGN LABOUR¹⁷

	1959		1965		1971	
	Bahraini	Foreign	Bahraini	Foreign	Bahraini	Foreign
Total labour force	29,875	15,630	30,236	21,015	37,950	22,351

There are no statistics available since 1971 as the government has conducted no surveys, so we used the work permits issued by the Ministry of Labour between 1971 and 1973 to show the influx of foreign labour with the consent of the Ministry, which claims to be looking after the interests of the local worker.

TABLE 6. NUMBER OF WORK PERMITS ISSUED BY THE MINISTRY OF LABOUR¹⁸

Year	Bahrainis	Foreigners
1971	9,372	8,881
1972	3,578	3,795
1973	3,340	6,877

During National Assembly debates on employment, the Minister of Labour offered the following basic statistics. The labour force in Bahrain numbers 67,000 of whom 18,000 are government employees, 20,000 employees and workers of companies (124 companies), 30,000 are employed in other undertakings.¹⁹ A correspondent of *Al Nahar* gave the following information: "In Bahrain 60,000 students are crushed under the weight of classical syllabi while there are 35,000 foreign workers including 10,000 Indians, 7,000 Arabs and 3,000 British and various other national groups of workers."²⁰

We can summarise the educational policy followed by the government which wants to maintain fifty percent illiteracy and has no interest in developing education except on the Saudi model. It follows a demagogic policy in technical education, and is quick to fire teachers who show their concern about an education programme which has not changed since the days of British Protection. There is no attempt at planning to relate education to the economic future of the country.

The regime's desperate concern to serve foreign companies and monopolies by not subjecting them to local laws has been exposed by the government's own statistics. They also reveal the serious complaints levelled against local contractors.

TABLE 7. PROPORTION OF FOREIGN EMPLOYEES IN COMPANIES²¹

COMPANY	% foreign employees
Bahrain Slipway Co.	84
Basric Co.	80
Philip Houseman	60
Middle East Engineering	60
El Zayyani Institutions	55
The African Co.	50
Yusef Ahmad Kanoo Organisation	45

From these figures it is evident that the main reason for the import of labour is not the absence of local labour, nor is it the lack of sufficient levels of technical skill²². The most important reasons are:

1. The regime and the foreign companies in Bahrain do not like the idea of a solid Bahraini working class. They have learnt from successive confrontations from 1938 through the fifties and sixties, that workers are a revolutionary class willing to fight for their rights. Therefore they have been quick to break up major concentrations of workers, making use of American experience in BAPCO in the following way:

- a) By attempting to keep workers as contracted labour. Directly hired labourers are sacked under the pretext that work is completed and there is no work; the company then appoints sub-contractors to bring the same or other workers to do long-term work such as maintenance. Thousands of workers are moved from company to company often being without employment for periods of days or even months; this has forced many of them to emigrate or to seek employment in other sectors such as the government sector.
- b) Some workers were transferred from BAPCO to ALBA for example, under the pretext of the latter's need for skilled labour and the need to use national resources to the full. Then, the workers would discover that they have been transferred totally to the ALBA payroll, as temporary workers who can be dismissed when construction work is finished.
- c) Heavy reliance on automation, sacking workers on the grounds that machines have taken the place of human labour. This reveals that the basic aims of enticing these monopolies is not to create more job opportunities, but to reap fast and fabulous profits.

2. A solid working class has the possibility of imposing its demands.

This was proved in the period 1954-1956 when the BAPCO workers were the spearhead of the nationalist movement. Therefore to deal with this situation the government and the companies rely on sackings and dismissals, bringing in non-Arab foreign workers as they fear the growth of solidarity between Bahrainis and their brother Arab workers. On the whole, they prefer Indians and Pakistanis, who fear dismissal, particularly since most of them are either smuggled in or brought in by contractors specialised in importing labour. Government agents create further dissension by spreading chauvinist attitudes depicting foreign workers as the cause of all Bahrain's problems and the scourge of the Bahraini worker. They thus divert attention as far as possible from the real attitudes of the regime and local and foreign capitalists who do not care about the nationality of a worker but about the profit they can extract from him.

3. The regime has realised that the working class stands at the forefront of the nationalist and democratic struggle. The piecemeal offerings of the authorities following every popular revolt have attracted wide sectors of other social strata and especially the bourgeoisie. The working class has, on the other hand, increased its struggle for political freedom and its just rights. So the authorities are keen to create a labour aristocracy, and to attract more foreign workers who will not be able to understand quickly because of linguistic difficulties. The regime believes it will thus be able to put an end to the nationalist movement by dividing the workers' movement.

4. The foreign companies backed by local agents headed by leading members of the ruling family want to reap greater profits and to employ workers under harsh conditions - with long hours and low pay. This arouses great opposition on the part of the local workers. They therefore rely on drawing supplies from those massive pools of unemployed labour in Pakistan, India and elsewhere. The Asian worker gets much higher wages than he would get in his own country, he is also prepared to work long hours as he fears being sacked. And since he thinks of the improvement in his situation as compared with the past, his revolutionary consciousness is weak. All these operations bring higher profits for the companies, contractors and agents, i.e. the alliance of foreign and local forces forged to drain the workers' labour power and to sow ruin and corruption in the ranks of the working class by encouraging chauvinist, sectarian and regional ideas.

The results of this policy are reflected in the demands made by workers' strikes in the past years: these have centred on the demand to Bahrainise jobs. In spite of our belief in the unity of the working class and its interests against foreign companies and the ruling authorities, the slogans raised by the Bahraini working class were aimed at exposing this puppet regime linked to world imperialism which seeks to serve the interests of the monopolies and never answers the demands of the workers: it is a regime which plays on the secondary contradictions within the working class and the petit bourgeoisie at the same time as it raises slogans and passes laws which it never implements. Slogans about protecting the native workers are for local consumption only, since we find the Minister of Labour signing deals in other foreign countries to import yet more labour. And even when the regime says it is giving preference to Arab workers, it does the exact opposite, since it carries out a policy of harassment against them in addition to tightening work permit regulations for Arabs to the point where there are fewer Arab workers (excluding Bahrainis) in Bahrain than in any of the Amirates, even though the regime is shouting about Arabism and Arab cooperation.

Despite demands put forward by the working class since 'independence' in 1971 for the formation of a Bahrain Workers' Union, and the enormous efforts made in some quarters to form trade unions, the regime has opposed any organisation of the working class in defence of its rights and demands. The regime's reactionary stand confirms its backwardness and narrow mindedness and its total opposition to all mass and workers' movements. It imagines it can solve the workers problems by methods and decrees imposed against their will.

The Bahraini working class has called for unionisation and has made many sacrifices to win its right to form trade unions: these do not have the ulterior motive of bringing down the regime, but intend to defend the rights of the workers against exploitation by the companies. The need for unionisation has been clear to the workers since the arrival of the oil companies when they discovered from their own experience that 'one hand can't clap' and that one worker's demand for a rise in wage cannot be achieved without demanding a rise in all the workers' wages. They realised that workers' unity was a major force in confronting the oil monopoly they worked for. Although this demand for unionisation has continued for nearly forty years in Bahrain, the tribal mentality, despotism, profit seeking, and subjection to foreign capital ensured the regime's rejection of this demand.

The government's refusal to respond to the workers' demand for unionisation, its constant efforts to split and divide the workers, and its current efforts to set up its own kind of unions are not the only results of its policy in this field. Its economic policy serving the interests of the monopoly companies and their local agents has given birth to a whole series of local crises, and most importantly: the housing crisis, inflation, a worsening health situation, the spreading of disease and a general decline in public services.

HOUSING AND SOCIAL SERVICES.

The regime which previously concentrated on the limited British 'open door' policy and is now trying to throw open the door to all, has dealt with the housing problem in a way which will offer²³ no solution, however much the Gulf regimes which suffer a similar problem have tried to offer aid and assistance. The causes of the problem can be summarised as follows:

1. Businessmen and their need for luxury flats and villas. This is what Khalifa bin Salman and the gang of landowners are trying to cater for by their slum clearance programmes and the confiscation of agricultural land.
2. Workers coming from various parts live in miserable conditions crowded into shanty towns, in mud walled or old shabby houses, clubbing together to pay the exorbitant rents.
3. Increased housing needs of low income Bahrainis, either because of the increased size of families in one house, or the presence of large numbers of working families who have lived for years in rented accommodation without ever owning any property. With the influx of foreign businessmen and workers, rents have rocketed up so that a worker may have to pay as much as half of his salary for accommodation.
4. Government neglect of rural regions remote from the capital (despite the smallness of Bahrain) and their concentration on the principal towns because of higher profitability and its present policy of clearing coastal

areas, as if there is no land available suitable for building. Its aim is to protect the interests of the companies and their agents, and income from financial taxes on new lands and the hotels and properties which will be built on them.

The fumbling nature of government policy is very clear in this field. During National Assembly debates in 1974, the Prices Committee announced that the country needed 1000 housing units²⁴ to solve the housing crisis. When the regime dissolved the National Assembly, the Minister of Housing announced that 15,000 units were needed³³. Thus in one year the government estimate had risen 15 times. If the needs of the population are ignored in this sphere, there is little doubt that they are also largely ignored in other areas.

The August government claims it can solve the housing crisis within a short period. But the people who still hear promises wonder about the projects the government will initiate now that seven months have passed since the promises were made.

The crises are not confined to the areas we have mentioned but extend to every area:

1. HEALTH: Thousands of foreign workers have been brought into the country by contractors. They are crammed by the hundreds into confined quarters, often streets and mosques. Infectious diseases are widespread. The government does not care because it has the right under its laws to dismiss and expel any foreign worker. It is not interested in the health of workers since it wants to get rid of some of them anyway. In addition hospital facilities which were built at an earlier stage and under very different circumstances cannot cope with the needs of the population. In spite of enthusiastic propaganda about enormous health projects, there is a plan to build a special hospital for the ruling family, and to open more private clinics which the workers and other poor people cannot afford to attend. The clearance policy being undertaken by various companies has created crises in Houra and Ras Raman and all the coastal areas in that sewers have overflowed and the possibilities of epidemics is high.

In regard to refuse disposal, we can only repeat the words of the British expert who fled from Bahrain after one month of studying the problem. He asked: "Has Bahrain become the refuse dump for the whole Gulf?" - whereupon the Minister of Local Government insisted on saying he would make Bahrain the most beautiful and cleanest spot in the Gulf within two years, i.e. by 1976.

2. PRICES: Prices of foodstuffs and basic consumer goods have increased so much that many people are unable to provide for their basic needs; many with limited incomes can only have one meal a day, while Sheikhs take the best kinds of food as a direct tax to the ruler and the merchants make fantastic profits from manipulating prices. To satisfy the traders and reduce popular anger, the post-August government has subsidised traders to the tune of several million Dinars from public funds, so that they can sell at reduced prices without any loss of profit. In spite of this Bahrain is by no means, as the Ruler claimed at the beginning of the new unconstitutional era, the cheapest country in the Gulf.

3. SOCIETY: As for the spread of diseases, the decline in morals and growing drug addiction, a medical committee has said that Bahrain has some 10,000 drug addicts²⁶, one of the highest percentages of the population in the world. Prostitution is a profitable trade with a rich market among the sheikhs and their entourage.

Many organisations are active in this trade and the compradors are ready to supply the requirements of the Sheikhs in return for concessions for their operations in other fields.

The policy of steering the national economy in the interests of international monopolies to draw off our national and Gulf wealth, has had a serious effect on the agricultural and fishery sectors, and all traditional economic activities. The country has begun to import all its vegetable requirements. The policy of subservience has reached the point where large quantities of fish are imported while the Ross fishing company, who have a subsidiary in Bahrain throws thousands of tons of dead fish into the sea. This scandal is not limited to the period of the National Assembly on whom the regime has put all the blame. The new budget for 1976 contains a paragraph concerning the importation of fish from New Zealand²⁷. Meanwhile UN reports declare the Gulf to be one of the richest fishing grounds in the world and that the total quantity extracted by the Gulf states will not exceed 10% of the stocks.

SAUDI ARABIA AND IRAN

U.S. Imperialism depends on two fundamental forces to protect its interests in the region, Iranian reaction and Saudi reaction. These two reactionary regimes compete in offering loyalty to the Americans, and they compete for influence in a disputed area like the Amirates. Bahrain falls within the area which Saudi Arabia and Iran have been contesting for years. When the Iranian regime repeated its claim to Bahrain in the late 1960s, the Saudi regime opposed it; it was afraid of Iranian influence so close to the region it considered to be its own sphere of influence. Thus Saudi Arabia was working with the Americans to solve the Bahrain problem; it aimed to preserve the "Arabism" of Bahrain and thus gained influence over the country after 1970.

Saudi economic interests in Bahrain, through which Saudi Arabia can apply political pressure, are growing: Saudi oil refined in the Bahrain refinery is more than double Bahraini output; the Abu Sa'fa oil field was given as a free gift to the Bahraini rulers by the Saudis; trading interests are increasingly linked. This economic influence gives Saudi Arabia political influence on everything that happens; so great was this that in 1971, the Bahraini authorities did not dare to announce independence without getting King Faisal's blessing.

This economic link gives Saudi Arabia increasing room for political pressure. For this reason the Saudi reactionaries decided to oppose the offers of economic aid made by Kuwait to Bahrain in 1971-1972 in an effort to win Bahrain away from the Saudis. Saudi Arabia proposed more economic agreements so that by the end of 1974 the two parties had arrived at a comprehensive system of military, economic and cultural cooperation:

1. All goods passing between Bahrain and Saudi Arabia are exempted from tax. A joint bank and a cement factory in Eastern Saudi Arabia have been set up and there is a plan to build a causeway joining the Islands to the mainland.
2. A cultural agreement containing a Saudi financial commitment to build schools, mosques and training centres and to supply Bahrain with teachers and textbooks.²⁸

3. There is a military agreement whose clauses have not been revealed.

But Bahraini officials have stated more than once that there is systematic military coordination with Saudi Arabia. They point to the military manoeuvres undertaken by the Saudi Air Force in June 1975. At this time a newspaper report stated: *"the importance of this event lies in the fact that it is the first of its kind in the Saudi-Bahraini relationship. It also fits into the framework of Saudi Arabia's practical approach to the Gulf states, especially at the military level, since the Saudis never previously attempted such coordinated manoeuvres with a Gulf state. More importantly, this step comes within the new Gulf order, pointing to the fact that the middle region of the eastern peninsula, i.e. Qatar and Bahrain, have moved inside the Saudi circle"*.²⁹

Subservience to Saudi reaction is also apparent in two other fundamental matters: the first is the oil question. The Bahrain government has always said that in oil matters it will be guided by the 'wise' steps taken by the government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The Bahrain Minister of Development stated: *"Every Arab state is moving in the same direction. We are influenced by what happens in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. If the Arab states decide on nationalisation, we will nationalise ... if they opt for 60% participation we shall take 60% participation."*³⁰ But the truth behind this devious statement was revealed when Kuwait took over all the shares of the Kuwait Oil company while Bahrain continued to watch her 'Saudi sister' before making any move related to marketing or management.

At another level, the oil imported from the Saudi Kingdom and refined in Bahrain is not subject to any restrictions nor is there any debate over what taxes should be gained from it. The matter is considered to be the concern of the two companies BAPCO and ARAMCO only, which are run by the same companies, Standard Oil of California and Texaco, the two owners of BAPCO, are shareholders in ARAMCO. It is as though the lands over which Saudi oil passes are considered a part of the eastern province of Saudi Arabia. All this is in return for aid in other fields which proves the closeness of relations and the degree of Saudi influence on the situation in these islands (see table 8).

TABLE 8. OIL REFINED IN BAHRAIN ('000s barrels)³¹

	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974
from Bahrain	25,311	27,543	17,813	27,941	27,392	25,567	24,882	24,586
from Saudi Arabia	62,445	55,877	58,159	63,518	65,943	60,309	64,744	64,834
Total	87,756	83,420	85,972	90,459	93,335	85,876	89,626	89,420
S.A./ B. oil	2.5	2.03	2.1	2.28	2.4	2.4	2.6	2.6

The second factor is a foreign policy based on subservience. The Bahraini regime takes the same position as the Saudis both in relations with socialist countries with whom it refuses to exchange diplomatic representatives or to establish economic and trade agreements, and in its relations with the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. A number of officials have said they cannot take one step in this direction until they get the green light from Riyadh.

On the other hand, the Bahrain regime is seeking total harmonisation with the Saudi reactionary regime but it is not oblivious to Iranian influence. It is trying to benefit from the Saudi-Iranian contradiction to extract more wealth in return for further compromises of national sovereignty: signing military and economic agreements which give these two reactionary regimes greater opportunities to control Bahrain's internal affairs. Iran abandoned its claim to Bahrain in 1970 as part of the American plan, but it retains a strong position in Bahrain. With expanding Iranian economic and commercial presence, the presence of the Iranian intelligence agency SAVAK, has also increased. SAVAK spies on Iranians living in Bahrain but the Shah also sees himself as the defender of the US and other imperialist interests. The growth of the revolutionary movement, the expansion of mass activity, and the inability of the regime to overcome the revolutionary movement have pushed the Iranian regime towards closer integration at every level of its intelligence service with local and especially with imperialist, intelligence agencies. The Iranians keep a particular eye on the development of relations between the Omani, Bahraini and other revolutionary groups in the Gulf. Having undertaken the task of wiping out the armed revolution in Oman it will not waste any time in offering advice and military and security assistance in the struggle against the Nationalist movement in Bahrain.

RECENT POLITICAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

When the regime announced the dissolution of the National Assembly, and the suspension of the constitution which it had itself promulgated in 1972-1973, the People's Front in Bahrain identified the reasons which led the regime to take such steps and defined the revolutionary position which must be taken in the light of the new situation. The revolutionary stance was to criticise the repressive police state measures, to expose them and the new conditions which had made the regime turn *volte face* from the course it had apparently taken after the declaration of 'independence', forming a constitutional committee, then a National Assembly, only to throw it all in the dustbin two years later. They then talked of the danger of imported democracy and the need to cling to pure democracy. Dissolving the Assembly was not enough. The campaign against the nationalist movement had been stepped up before the dissolution and has continued to the present day.

In the new circumstances, it is no longer possible for us to keep silent about the new conspiracy: we must offer more proof of the reactionary nature of the regime, rather than try to demonstrate the regime's good intentions as some nationalist forces tried to do in the early days of the National Assembly. Our basic concern now is to defend the Bahraini nationalist democratic movement and to expose the new security plan and the reasons for the changes in the regime's strategy within a mere two and a half years. It is therefore necessary to look back to the conditions and window dressing which accompanied the creation of the Assembly, and to the conditions which led to the dissolution of that Assembly and the class interests involved.

The Constitutional Committee can be explained by the political changes which the imperialists wanted to introduce as part of their strategy for the Arab Gulf region. When Britain granted formal independence to the Bahraini ruling family, there had to be some changes and amendments in the regime to give some appearance of 'independence'. It was also necessary to sift through the old dossiers of nationalist demands to find what could be done now and got away with.

It was obvious that the productive forces in the country had developed economically, culturally and politically, while political and legal relations had not changed for years. British imperialism had played its role in crushing and curbing the national democratic forces, but after the announcement of the British withdrawal a new, open door policy, was adopted. This forced the ruling forces to change their structures and form a partnership with their class allies in the executive and legislative, and to extend their network of patronage. The merging of ruling family trade and property interests with those of major traders and contractors forced the ruling family to select ministers from big merchant and traditional families. They tried to use the nationalists of the fifties and sixties, by bringing them into the executive: they wanted to use their experience to reform the system from within, according to the philosophy of Yusif Shirawi and Ali Fakhroo.

When the ruling family wanted to set up a constitutional committee, it rejected the demand put forward by the nationalist movement since the Twenties that all members of such a committee should be elected. Instead, they accepted the view of middlemen and high officials who demanded a system of half appointment half election³². This was at a time when the nationalist movement had reached a high level of struggle and had increased its political and democratic demands, to which the regime could not respond³³.

It is clear that the main function of the National Assembly was to make piecemeal amendments in the structure of the system following the withdrawal of the British. One cannot talk about 'independence' under the leadership of a sheikh and government whom the English set up unless new elements are introduced. And these piecemeal reforms were undoubtedly in the interests of the middle bourgeoisie, who wanted anything which would put the country on the threshold of a constitutional phase, even if nothing really changed. Therefore some of the most enthusiastic supporters of the regime's plans were former leaders of the 1954-56 reform movement. They gave the measures their blessing.

When the authorities produced the National Assembly, their intention was naturally to use it as an asset when talking of democracy in Bahrain. Despite this, they continued their arrest campaigns throughout 1972-73. The authorities wanted the Assembly to be a rubber stamp, nothing more. The Foreign Minister, reassuring those who might doubt the regime's intention, said: *"I would like to put it on record that the government wants to work with the Assembly in a spirit of respect and cooperation. If there is a problem it must be solved in a properly worked out way ... according to the principles of parliamentarianism"*³⁴. One deputy had no doubts whatsoever about the regime's intentions when he said *"I do not doubt the sincerity of the government or their good intentions and their firm determination to respect this honourable congress and cooperate with it."*³⁵

Another aim of the authorities was to draw the nationalist movement into the open, and get it to lay its cards on the table, so that there would be no room for political activity outside the Assembly. The Prime Minister gave a clear indication of this after the dissolution of the Assembly when he said *"We have been watching the political situation for many years, and we have considerable experience in following the trends which are alien to our region. It is our view that if these trends are going to operate it is better for them to be on the surface. And indeed we selected the democratic path, to let these groups operate openly rather than secretly"*³⁶. Through this illusion and to give people the impression that the democratic phase really had begun in Bahrain, the regime

for a short while seemed to give free rein to political activity. Some forces imagined that they could achieve major reforms by joining the National Assembly, and that they could get rid of corrupt laws one after the other. They were imagining that the regime is stupid to the point of naïveté. One of the deputies, debating the subject of prisoners and the Emergency laws, expressed it well, saying *"I do not doubt the government's good and honourable intentions, but this law has forged a great gulf between the government and the people. It has given a free hand to the police to behave as it pleases, without regard for legal processes and measures which the people accept and follow. This law is the cause of the widening of the rift, and it has created a credibility gap between the government and the people. Because we are eager for good will between government and people without any attempts to shake this confidence, we consider it essential that this law be revoked."*³⁷

But the workers who have undertaken numerous strikes in companies and institutions quickly discovered the government's plan. This forced the government to show its hand, arresting a number of nationalists on 24 June 1975. And they announced the State Security law, which clearly revealed the futility of reformist efforts to heal the rift between the people and the puppet government. This law redoubled the people's hatred of the regime. It also strengthened the unity of the nationalist forces whose views on whether to boycott or participate in the National Assembly had differed widely.³⁸

The isolationist position taken by some forces in the workers' movement in the mistaken belief that the age of democracy had dawned in the country and that it was possible to give 'glad tidings' to the working class was exposed. All the forces discovered the real nature of the repressive regime and the need to prepare the masses to oppose this law. This enraged the regime, and led Muhammad bin Mubarak to exclaim in the National Assembly that he would listen to the people's representatives in the Assembly but he would never listen to 18,000 citizens who presented a petition rejecting the new oppressive law.

During the second session of the Assembly, it became obvious that it was incapable of doing anything about foreign intervention in the country, or the activities of the Special Branch, or the dictatorial behaviour of the ruling family and their ministers. While the Assembly was misled by the attitudes of the regime the political and economic crisis in the region was, as we discussed earlier in this study, developing rapidly. The living conditions of the people deteriorated. It became clear that the reactionary class forces which were looking to the Assembly to regulate the situation, could do without it and could pass laws via the Executive Authority. The liberals found that the new circumstances provided reasonable opportunities to get rich and that consequently the democratic freedoms they had been demanding were not worth so much noise. And the forces who wanted to introduce reforms in the power structure were convinced that some elements in the regime were against democracy and that betting on 'democratic' elements might change the spots of the confirmed reactionaries.

As if to prove at every occasion that it is a real enemy of the working class and the masses and an adjunct of the foreign monopolies, the ruling class cannot survive without foreign protection against its enemy the people; its interests are to retain close links with foreigners, handing over the country and its national sovereignty to imperialism. In return, US imperialism, which learned a hard lesson at the hands of the revolutionary movement in Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and the peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America, finds it best to hide behind local class forces rather than expose its ugly face to the masses. In this way, the interests of imperialism are intertwined with those of the reactionaries, Iran and Saudi Arabia. Many imperialist strategies are passed on by these two regimes to the Gulf statelets. Thus it is not necessary to gamble on the

piecemeal reforms undertaken by the Bahraini regime, nor to delude the masses that the situation in Bahrain will follow a different path from that of the rest of the Gulf, as it is totally tied to the rest of the region.

Thus the positions taken by the puppet regime were not in any way strange or incomprehensible to the revolutionaries of the People's Front in Bahrain, since the rising class struggle will be reflected in all the basic institutions of the regime. The reactionary forces will take the positions dictated by their fundamental interests, and will not hesitate to abandon any constitutional formation which does not conform with their new requirements. The positions taken by the regime have aroused anxiety among a number of political circles, whether those who wanted to see the experiment continue as a way of taking away the ground from the nationalist movement, or those who are fully aware of the dictatorial, bullying tendencies of the Prime Minister, expressing the interests of the compradors and major property dealers.

Some Kuwaiti newspapers closely linked with the Kuwaiti commercial bourgeoisie expressed their apprehensions. Al Qabas, for example, pointed out: *"the deliberations of the National Assembly over the State security issue, political prisoners, and the agreement with the US over naval facilities have had no practical effect which might suggest that the Assembly participates in producing the state's political decisions ... but in the question of the dismissed teachers, some think that the Assembly had launched itself into a hopeless case, pointing out that the Assembly sent the government a recommendation to reinstate the teachers. It made no impression. The Assembly is not a kind of pressure group. In the opinion of these people, the Assembly wants only to be smoke in the fire and they add that the government's lack of regard for the Assembly in refusing its requests shook people's confidence in the Assembly, which they find has achieved little on the level of legal or democratic work."*³⁹

Al Qabas added that it appeared to some members and some observers of the Assembly's meetings that the government let the speeches and suggestions of the members go in one ear and out the other⁴⁰.

This clearly reflects the government's attitude towards democracy and the position of the National Assembly in this important issue and its role in political life. While the regime was hesitating between the Kuwaiti and the Saudi position on foreign policy and a repressive internal policy, it saw the Assembly as a means of reducing popular hatred, and of gaining respite from the wrath of the opposing political forces. But when it discovered that the masses understood the situation very well and that activity of the revolutionary movement was increasing, it acted on Saudi advice.

The developments in the economic situation and their influence on the attitudes of the political forces towards the most significant issue put forward by the regime, i.e. the State Security Law, explains the measures taken by the regime and the response of the various political groups to the repressive actions.

When the regime proposed the law, the religious bloc in the National Assembly added a clause concerning the fight against atheism, and supported the repressive law. But the religious bloc was surprised by the widespread popular opposition which almost removed its electoral base, so, while at heart it approved the law, it quickly joined the other factions in calling for modifications to it. When the regime dissolved the Assembly, the bloc fully supported the regime. It praised the repressive steps and called for tough measures against the nationalist movement.⁴¹

The reactionary forces represented by the religious bloc can only think that parliamentary practice and democratic freedom are doors to communism. Thus they did not hesitate to support repressive measures against the masses nor did they feel threatened by the suspension of the constitution. It harrassed the revolutionary movement and made propaganda for the regime's police state measures.

The Centre bloc is a broad trend representing the middle bourgeoisie, ranging from the grand and middle bureaucrats to the contractors and entrepreneurs in their various forms in addition to the property dealers and the dignitaries in the distant towns and villages. It has always taken vacillating positions. In spite of its opposition to the State Security Law, the majority of its members went back on their words about freedom. They bowed their heads before the storm because they were now able to reap profits the like of which they had never dreamed of in the days of the Assembly.

As for the Popular bloc: our disagreements with them over the correct analysis of the situation prevailing in the 1973 elections and the correct nationalist position related to it, we can say that they stood against this repressive law and they realised that the regime was trying to set a trap for the nationalist movement. They learned that it had no serious intention of giving up its dictatorial ways and that the top officials had far less interest to fill the chasm between the people and the government than in serving the international monopolies. They saw that the regime was no more intelligent than the rulers of Kuwait when they did not rig the elections but supported the fragmentation of the nationalist movement; it removed its basis and took advantage of the varied tactics used by the nationalist movement and its groups to confront the regime.

THE POSITION OF THE PEOPLE'S FRONT

The People's Front has always taken a firm stand against the oppressive regime in Bahrain. When the Khalifa government dissolved the National Assembly, it declared its opposition to these measures and its condemnation of all repressive campaigns. It confirmed that it will continue the struggle for democracy and to achieve the political and social demands of the people and rid them of the regime. Our stand is based on the following five principles:

1. The demand for a constitutional life is a democratic demand of the nationalist movement: it corresponds to the demands of wide strata of the people whether middle class, lower middle class, or even the more enlightened elements of the upper classes, as well as the workers and down-trodden masses; they are well aware that political freedom will not solve their fundamental social problems but that it will give them greater possibilities than a regime of repression. If parliamentary life is a legitimate democratic demand, then the participation in the Assembly or boycotting of it by revolutionary forces is related to the conditions prevailing at the time of the elections and to the analysis of the prevailing circumstances. It depends on the usefulness of the Assembly in deepening contradictions and developing awareness amongst the people of the strategies and intentions of the current government. Thus it is not an absolute question of participation or boycott regardless of circumstances.

Our analysis of the 1973 elections was that the Assembly was a means for the regime to break its isolation and distract attention from the crimes it had committed by its repressive policies. Our view was that we do not

need to build bridges between the regime and the people but rather to foil the regime's plot by boycotting the Assembly. We therefore boycotted the 1973 elections. But when the circumstances suddenly changed and the Assembly became an obstacle to the regime we opposed its dissolution. We demanded democratic freedoms and called for the need to take our freedom from the ruling clique.

2. In the last two years many things have changed in the region. From the defeat of the US in Vietnam to the Iran-Iraq agreement, the assassination of Faisal, US mediation in the Middle East and the phenomenal increase in oil revenues. All these factors have, directly or indirectly, sharpened the class and political struggles inside the country, and the revolutionary resurgence of the people. The regime's only course of action was to launch a campaign of repression and to dissolve the National Assembly.

3. The alternative the regime has now offered is far worse in that it is a blatant dictatorship; it talks of Consultative Councils (majlis al Shura) in imitation of the one we have heard of since the death of Faisal in Saudi Arabia; but we have seen no trace of it. It seems that the Bahraini regime will copy a great deal from its Saudi big brother. After putting about the claim that it can be a model for the Amirates and Saudi Arabia because the Shura is a council of compradors, property dealers, the ruling family and opportunists, we find that Bahrain is proposing to follow the same path. We therefore oppose the dissolution of the National Assembly with our clear analysis, and this stand is directed against the piecemeal measures which are being prepared and which contain great threats to the democratic movement in Bahrain.

While we oppose the dissolution of the Assembly, that does not mean that the reinstatement of the Assembly would be the correct solution to the country's political, social and economic problems; these problems are linked to the very essence of the regime, and cannot therefore be resolved without radical changes in the regime. We must not deceive the masses with the idea that we can solve their problems through the parliaments set up in these city states. At best they represent a concession by the regime and its repressive reactionary aspect to some democratic demands, and its inability to disregard the will of the popular classes for political freedom; this will create a better atmosphere for the revolutionary movement to challenge the regime and its relations with imperialism, and will provide better opportunities to develop the consciousness of the masses and to organise them.

4. The dissolution of the Assembly was part of the new scheme of repression. It is also an open application of the State Security Law; the government formulated it in mid-1974 and put it into practice without having the nerve to announce it publicly. Therefore the new repressive measures came as a clear declaration of war against the democratic movement and cannot be seen in isolation from the arrests, expulsions and revoking of freedom, severe censorship of the press and rejection of all popular political demands.

5. If the dissolution of the National Assembly is an expression of the internal crisis being experienced by the regime as a result of the increasing contradictions in our society and the growing significance of the working class and the other popular classes, it is also part of the attempt to enforce a Gulf Security Pact under the aegis of the USA and Iran. Each reactionary Arab regime is now applying it in its own way. Thus our struggle against the regime's actions is a link in our struggle against the Gulf Pact.⁴² Defeat-
int the regime's policy against the nationalist movement is part of the task of confronting US strategy and that of their reactionary allies.

THE NATIONALIST MOVEMENT IN THE NEW CONJUNCTURE

Given the new political changes, the nationalist forces need to exert greater efforts and have a deeper awareness in order to confront the present situation and to prevent the enemy alliance from achieving its aims. They must force them to abandon the offensive position which they occupied in August and take up a defensive one, consequently transferring the nationalist movement from the defensive to the offensive. Such a confrontation with imperialism and reaction calls for a number of conditions without which the transformation and victory over the enemy cannot be achieved.

The first condition is the natural unity between various units active in the nationalist democratic struggle and a shift to confronting the new situation concentrating on a proper understanding of the current stage and the tasks of the Nationalist movement. We have always asserted that the fundamental contradictions lie in the contradiction between the people and its national democratic forces on the one hand and imperialism and its reactionary allies on the other. The organisations of the nationalist movement must overcome all the secondary contradictions existing amongst them.

The August attack was a great opportunity for the nationalist movement to unify its ranks and indeed the joint declaration issued at that time was a worthy beginning. Yet nothing noteworthy took place afterwards. Things returned to their old patterns as a result of mistaken practice and of a subjectivism arising from considering joint work as a tactic not a strategy. Various elements of the opposition were ready to destroy what had been achieved by unity, to set up barriers and to take unilateral positions without consideration for the national interest as a whole. They thought that nationalist work can be carried out by one faction on its own.

The second condition is that the opposition must respect the wishes of the people and constantly adhere to the mass revolutionary line. The nationalist movement is not required to be a substitute for the workers and mass movements; but it must be the vanguard of this movement, must lead its struggle and educate and organise it so that it can launch more struggles against the regime. It is not required to bring 'glad tidings' on appropriate occasions to the workers and mass movement. This problem demands respect for the broad wishes of the masses: without this nothing can be achieved. It is the people who make history. Thus it is a grave mistake for any nationalist unit to form organisations on its own and present them as representative of the working class without the participation of the active and trustworthy elements of the masses in their region and without consulting the nationalist movement as a whole.

To imagine that the masses do not understand and that we have to arrange everything is an error. We should beware of it. The masses have proved their ability to struggle and they have learnt by experience how to form various weapons for the struggle against the regime.

Such practices do not help in breaking down the barriers between the various elements of the national democratic movement, but strengthen them. At this stage we must avoid anything which may lead any faction to withdraw from united action: rather we must strengthen our unity. Respecting the wishes of the masses means respecting all the relations and associations in this or that mass institution. They must not be interfered with. The view of the majority must be respected in these institutions, and there must be united struggle to correct any misguided ideas or practices. We must struggle in this field so that we do not leave the door open for the regime to destroy the work of the masses and to strike at it under the pretext of the 'struggle against political factions'. Taking away this weapon from the regime can only come from correct work in these mass institutions.

The second condition is part of the first. National unity is a weapon that is strong as steel and necessary to the nationalist movement. Without this weapon, all our efforts will be dissipated in different directions and our opposition to the regime will be weak. The struggle for national liberation and democracy demands the exertion of great efforts and the combination of all nationalists and democrats in unified action.

Our people - with their limited capabilities - are not cowed by the events of August. Nor are they deceived by the regime's propaganda. They can achieve great things by uniting the nationalist forces and by attacking a definite enemy for a definite aim. The recent measures taken by the regime express not the strength of a regime so much as its fear of the mass movement and its militant forces.

The People's Front in Bahrain,

March 1976.

FOOTNOTES

1. Sada al Usbur 2.12.75.
2. Minutes of the Sessions of the National Assembly 10.3.74
3. Ibid.
4. Op.Cit 17.2.74
5. ibid.
6. ibid.
7. Census for 1968,1973,1974, Ministry of National Economy.
8. Al Siyasa (Kuwait) 26.8.75
9. Concerning the role of these banks, Akhbar al Khaliij, commenting on the opening of the first office of American Express stated: "the new office will offer loans in foreign currency, deposit services and financial investment services to companies and individuals who are not resident in Bahrain. It will also provide financial services to the Bahraini government and its departments. The Managing Director of the institution, Mr. Bliss said that Bahrain had been chosen for the first office because of its long history as an important trading centre in the Gulf" Akhbar al Khaliij, Bahrain, 16.2.76
10. Al Anwar (Beirut) 26.9.75
11. Al Siyasa 28.8.75
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15. Education Statistics for 1972-3 and Annual Abstract of Statistics for 1968, Ministry of National Economy.
16. Population census, 1971, pp 8,9,10; 66,71
17. Census, 1959, 1965, 1971, from Statistics Office.
18. Statistics of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 1974
19. Al Qabas (Kuwait) 3.3.75
20. An Nahar (Beirut) 5.6.75. In the first half of 1975, the Ministry of Education fired 4 teachers because they had answered queries from the press about the education system and revealed its low standards. This system suffers from the colonial mentality of the days of Belgrave. All the demands of the National Assembly failed to get the teachers re-instated.
21. Minutes of the National Assembly 13.3.74
22. There is ample evidence of the skill of Bahraini workers. Following widespread sackings from BAPCO in 1938, 1956 and 1965, many Bahrain workers found employment in the Amirates and Saudi Arabia on important oil projects such as Tapline. In 1972, Gulf Air used Bahraini workers to train its Pakistani workers after which the Bahrainis were fired.
23. There is a housing crisis, even in Saudi Arabia, such that the Saudi government demands that companies provide their own housing for their own workers.
24. Minutes of the National Assembly 20.3.74
25. Al Mawakif (Bahrain) 14.11.75
26. Al Siyasa 25.11.75.
27. Sada al Usbur, 17.2.76.
28. MEED 15.11.74
29. Al Siyad 12.11.75.
30. Al Anwar 23.3.75
31. Statistics of BAPCO, 1967-1974
32. Al Adwa 3.2.72
33. Following the workers revolt in March 1972, the authorities' explanation of the brutal measures that were taken was for example the Minister of Labour's statement that: *"In the stage of construction, we have to impose the general will of the people over the will of the individual or the interest group. The companies are an economic necessity for Bahrain, and if we left the reins free to agitators to stir up the workers to achieve temporary gains, the result would be the departure of the companies, and the workers would be the losers... Bahrain can't support a parliamentary council and unions and a TUC and parties. All this means dividing people and we are one family."* Al Adwa 24.3.72.
34. Minutes of the National Assembly, 17.3.74.
35. ibid.
36. Al Siyasa 26.1.75.
37. Minutes of the National Assembly, 30.12.73.
38. The position of the People's Front in Bahrain on boycotting the elections has always been clear. (See Gulf Bulletin 6.)
39. Al Qabas 11.5.75
40. ibid.
41. see Al Mawakif (late August, and September 1975) concerning the campaign of repression.
42. Al Ra'i al 'Am (Kuwait) 2.12.75.

PRISONS IN BAHRAIN.

The following article on prisons in Bahrain was first published in a pamphlet called 'Bahrain'. It describes arrest and prison conditions and calls Security and Intelligence Service (SIS), what on previous pages has been described as the Special Branch. We reproduce it here as it gives considerable details of conditions suffered by political detainees.

ARREST PROCEDURES AND DISTRIBUTION OF CELLS

In general the SIS try to be very discreet while waging an arrest campaign. In most cases no one knows what is going on in the neighbourhood unless told by a member of the family of the arrested person. In these cases the SIS use a private car, which they park some hundred meters away from the house. A secret police officer walks to the house, asks for the person in question, waits for him to dress, and they walk back together to the waiting car. The person might come back after a short period of questioning and check up, or might be held for months or years.

This type of arrest does not have to include an arrest warrant, nor does it necessarily include a house search. The police might, however, return some time later to carry out a house search.

At other times the SIS employ a more spectacular type of arrest. This has been used frequently in recent years though not exclusively. The police then arrive in one or two police jeeps, sometimes accompanied by one or more private police cars. They then take positions around the house while the officer in charge marches to the door, accompanied by some policemen and undercover agents, knocks on the door and announces that the house will be searched. Immediately following the opening of the door and the announcement, the policemen in his company will storm into the house. Should the door not be opened fast enough, for whatever reason, the policemen then force their way in by breaking the door. This type of arrest is mostly carried out after midnight. This gives optimal effect. The timing of the arrest seems to be very important in police methods. In cases where discretion is sought, the time is usually about 4 am.

Nearly all the arrests carried out by the SIS during the campaign of the 25 June 1974 were of the so-called discreet type.

The police officer knocked on the door at about 4 am and asked for the person in question, told him that they had come to make a search. The officer showed, on request, a search warrant signed by a judge. With the warrant all formalities were satisfied. Then the officer, accompanied by at least four policemen, one or more in plain clothes, proceeded to search the house. The plain clothes men differentiate themselves from the uniformed policemen in that they belong to the secret police, the SIS. They are authorised to ensure that the search is carried out thoroughly and that neither the police officer, nor the uniformed policemen are careless in their search.

The police officer corps is formed exclusively by members of the ruling family and from families close to it, yet the SIS does not seem to trust them completely.

According to Bahraini law, the search warrant shall specify the person whose dwelling is to be searched. This is necessary from the point of view of the personal integrity of others living in the same house. (One should bear in mind that a normal family compound in Bahrain might be the home of the unmarried brothers and sisters of the person named on the warrant, and also of the married brothers and sisters and the parents). According to law and practice (followed to the letter in criminal cases) the search is to be carried out in the room or part of a room considered as normal dwelling of the named person. The SIS does not let itself be bound by such law and practice. A search by the SIS is a thorough search, meaning that every corner of the house is searched, be that the dwelling of the person in question or any other, no matter how distantly related. Normally the search is carried out in rather orderly fashion, things being put back in their places and so on. Yet it is not unusual that the whole house is turned into a mess and left as such after a police raid.

It seems that this is used as part of the psychological pressure on the person in question. The police will collect books, letters and other things considered evidence (most of the time this 'evidence' includes the most absurd objects, such as religious literature or simply a family picture album), and tell the person that he is required to follow them. Another warrant might be shown on request. This new warrant, the arrest warrant, should be signed by a judge and specify the nature of the crime for which the person is suspected and the date of the arrest. These last two conditions are not always fulfilled. In the 25 June 74 campaign many persons were searched and arrested after being shown a stenciled warrant in which their name had been inserted in ink. They felt that the judge had signed blank warrants that were later filled in according to need. The arrested person is photographed by the police before being left in the custody of the prison department. The prison officer locates the different detainees in different cells according to the directives given by the SIS.

The detainees are usually confined in solitary cells in the prisons. The golden rule followed in political detention is that no political detainee is put in the same cell or yard as 'normal' convicts. It is very difficult to uphold this practice at all times, especially when the number of political detainees becomes too large. Another factor against this practice is the ever fluctuating number of political detainees, at times no more than three and at others over 200. One can speculate, of course, about why the SIS wishes to separate its detainees from other convicts and detainees. One important factor is to strengthen their isolation.

Although the distribution of detainees to the different solitary cells might appear accidental, it is not. The solitary cells vary in the degree of degradation and inhuman conditions so that one rightly suspects the location of political detainees to be carefully studied. Each one gets the type of cell that harms him the most.

Cell number 1 is the worst from the point of view of hygiene. The police toilets above this cell gives the most unacceptable smell. Water/urine drips all day long, drop by drop onto the cell floor; it is humid and stinking. The window near the ceiling of the cell is blocked by a board, thus preventing any light from entering. The two cells near the police toilets in the south east corner of the fort (known as kunara) are famous for the difficulties they create for the detainees because of their complete isolation. In these cells there is no opportunity to see or talk to anyone other than on the 3 daily occasions when food is brought in. One should not get sick in those cells because nobody outside the cells will be able to hear the shouts for help. It is ghastly to feel deserted and neglected as a living human being.

The same can be said of the cells located in the tower, the two cells located within the secluded area of the SIS in the fort are cells that indicate that you are on stand-by for interrogation. When, how and how many, are

question that you have to live with in the complete isolation of the cells. (The SIS area is prohibited ground for anybody not employed by the SIS, regardless of position or rank). The cells in the police station are similar to those on Jidda island. They are far cleaner than those in the fort. They differ in the fact that detainees are seldom confined to solitary cells on the Jidda island.

PRISONS OF BAHRAIN

AL-QALA

Al-Qala 'the police fort' is situated near the centre of the capital, Manama. It was built in the 17th century by Nader Shah of Persia as a headquarters for his occupation forces in Bahrain. It has gone through a number of renovations but the main building still has the original architectural style, square and with a tower in each corner. The fort has expanded during the last twenty years, so much so that the original building is now only a small part of it. Yet it is the most important section because it contains the headquarters of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), the training staff offices and other police administration offices, the offices of the Ministry of the Interior, the director general of the police department and the police tele- and wireless communication centre. Surrounding the main building are various offices of the different police departments and a police barracks for bachelors, as well as some houses for police families, the police clinic, the horse stables and a number of villas occupied by European security officers plus the new police headquarter which is in its final stage of construction. All this is surrounded by a 3.5 meter high wall, with barbed wire on top. The fort has three main gates, the north gate used by the traffic police and the people coming to the traffic department, the north-east gate for public use, and the western gate for the security police and prisoner transportation.

The Prison

The Manama prison has an isolated section in the north-western part of the main building of *al-Qala*; it contains eight cells, a kitchen and prison guards room. The cells vary in size, four of them (numbers 2, 3, 4, and 7) are the largest. 2, 3, and 4 are ordinarily used for detainees including political ones, they have only one window looking onto the prison yard and measure about 4 x 2.5 m. The other cells are usually occupied by short-term prisoners. Connected to this prison are two cells which are effectively isolated from the rest of the prison and are used for solitary confinement. These cells measure 2 x 2 m. Above them are the toilets of the policemen and the prison guards. The cells are known as the toilets and are dreaded by the convicts because they are used as punishment. Across the yard towards the south-east are two cells about 3 x 2 m each which are also used as solitary confinement cells. The tower is also used as a cell: it can contain up to 25 beds. The southwestern tower on the other hand is so small that a person can hardly sit in it, but has to crouch. The SIS headquarters on the other side has two cells which are used mainly as temporary cells for interrogation, but are also used for ordinary confinement purposes.

JIDDA ISLAND

Jidda island was first used as a prison by the British advisor to the government. From the beginning it was a hard-labour camp because of the rocky structure of the island which provide cut stones. Forced labour for stone cutting continued until 1972 in spite of the fact that cut stones were no longer transported to the mainland or used on the island.

The island has two wharves, of which only one is currently in use. It is overlooked by the residence of the chief officer of the prison, who is

also in charge of all prisons in Bahrain. On the opposite side of the island, about 2 km away, is the island's police headquarters and its tower. The offices are also used as a clinic. The tower overlooks the prison yard some 50 meters away. The prison yard is also overlooked by the quarters of the policemen employed as prison guards. The prison yard includes a bakery, a kitchen, a shed used as a club premise, a library, toilets and 36 cells divided into 4 blocks, with 10, 14, 6 and 6 cells respectively. The last two blocks are of greatest interest. One of them had, once upon a time, the only cells available on the island and was reserved for commonwealth prisoners (hence the name it was given, the State House). Bahraini prisoners were chained to the ground and to each other. These six cells are now very old damp and extremely unhygienic even by Bahraini prison standards. It was not in use until 1974; but when the detainee cells were crowded in 1973, the state house was used as a detention for political prisoners. The other 6 cell block is used exclusively for political detainees, and is surrounded by an extra barbed wire fence to separate it from the prison yard. There is barbed wire and a door dividing this block into two halves. The cells on the island vary in size depending on the age of the block. The state house for example, has cells which measure 1 x 2 m, the 10 cell block 2 x 2m and the rest 2 x 1.5m.

AL-KHAMIS PRISON

Only unconfirmed information is available about this prison. It is used exclusively for juvenile delinquents and women.

OTHER PRISONS

Officially there exist no other prisons apart from those mentioned above. However, the Bahraini security forces employ a number of police stations as political detention centres. Of these the following can be mentioned:

1. Safra police training camp. This desert camp, situated between the towns of Rifaa and Awali, was used as late as June 1974 to detain ALBA workers, following the strikes in the company.
2. Rifaa police station, situated outside the town of Rifaa, used as a maximum isolation detention centre.
3. Zallaq police station, outside the coastal village of Zallaq. It functions in a similar way to the Rifaa police station.
4. Mina Salman police station, near Manama harbour, functions as the above.
5. Muharraq police station.
6. Bab-al-Bahrain police station in Manama.
7. Qudaibia police station.
8. Muharraq airport guards station.

These are some of the police stations which are used occasionally for temporary or transitional detention of political activists. Muharraq and Bab-al-Bahrain are also used as detention centres for common law prisoners. All the above-mentioned stations were used during the workers' strike in 1974.

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